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Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General chairs seventh round of talks on East Timor attended by Foreign Minsters of Portugal and Indonesia; parties agree to next round of talks in June.

- Secretary-General disturbed at reports of coup d'etat in Sierra Leone; says United Nations remains committed to supporting next month's elections.

- Security Council President expresses concern at continuing cease-fire violations in Angola; urges parties to refrain from military activities and improve climate of trust.

- Obstacles to ridding world of scourge of land-mines should not be underestimated, Secretary-General tells meeting of States parties to Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

- Secretary-General, offering condolences on death of King Moshoeshoe II of Lesotho, says monarch played essential role in search for stability and development in southern Africa.

- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights calls for conflicting parties in Chechnya to respect human rights and humanitarian law.

- Haiti's President-elect requests UNMIH remain for another six months; social and economic conditions still extremely harsh, with soaring unemployment and little investment.

- Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women discusses ways to follow-up on Beijing Conference; hears report from Cyprus.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in London today, held the seventh round of talks on the question of East Timor, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Secretary-General met separately with Portuguese Foreign Minister

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Jaime Gama and Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and then chaired a joint expanded meeting with delegations from both sides. He was accompanied by his Special Adviser for Political Affairs, Under-Secretary-General Yasushi Akashi.

The parties focused on developments since the last round of talks in July and on issues related to an eventual framework for a just, lasting, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the question of East Timor. The preservation and promotion of the cultural identity of the East Timorese people and bilateral relations between Indonesia and Portugal were also on the agenda. An eighth round of talks will be held in Geneva on 29 June.

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The Secretary-General is disturbed by reports of a coup d'etat in Sierra Leone today, according to a United Nations spokesman and believed the political future of the country should be determined by free and fair elections. The United Nations remained committed to supporting such elections next month, as already agreed.

The Secretary-General said his good offices also remained available, through his Special Envoy for Sierra Leone, Berhanu Dinka, to facilitate negotiations between the Government of Sierra Leone and the "Revolutionary United Front."

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Security Council President Sir John Weston (United Kingdom) has expressed concern at the continuing cease-fire violations in Angola. In a letter to President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and Dr. Jonas Savimbi, head of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), he urged the sides to refrain from military activities or troop movements and to speed up demining.

Ambassador Weston called on both leaders to convene an urgent meeting, without conditions, to improve the climate of trust and give new impetus to the peace process. A United Nations spokesman said the letter will be hand-delivered by United States Ambassador, Madeleine Albright, who arrives in the Angolan capital of Luanda tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Blondin Beye, has been informed that President dos Santos and Dr. Savimbi have agreed to meet in Libreville, Gabon, on 20 January, the spokesman said. The meeting will also be attended by the three observer countries -- Portugal, the Russian Federation and the United States.

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A total ban was the only way to halt the current massive proliferation of land-mines and cope with the nature and magnitude of the problem, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a message to a one-day meeting of States parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in Geneva, the Secretary-General said the obstacles which must be overcome before the world was rid of the scourge of land-mines should not be underestimated.

The Secretary-General said there were different perceptions on the legitimacy of land-mines and their role in defence planning. Governments had gained new understanding through the technical discussions at last year's meeting of States parties in Vienna, and he was confident many would address the military, technical and economic sacrifices needed to get rid of land-mines. Recent national measures on the transfer, production or reduction of existing stockpiles of anti-personnel mines had improved the political environment for further progress.

Meanwhile, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, expressed grave disappointment with the outcome of the Vienna meeting. In a statement issued yesterday, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Peter Hansen, said discussions had centered on the military and economic aspects of land-mines and failed to take adequately into account the humanitarian dimensions, particularly their devastating social and economic impact.

Mr. Hansen said an estimated 110 million land-mines around the world had caused an enormous humanitarian crisis, killing more than 800 people a month, maiming thousands and leaving whole countries devastated and unable to resume normal life after armed conflicts ended. The Committee called on General Assembly to urge the international community to increase financial, material and technical support for mine clearance.

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King Moshoeshoe II of Lesotho, who was killed yesterday in a car accident, had played an essential role in the search for stability and development in southern Africa, the Secretary-General said today. In a message to Queen Mamohato, the Secretary-General said he was shocked and profoundly saddened at the death of the King, whose wisdom and ability would long be remembered by the international community.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala Lasso, has called on the conflicting parties in Chechnya to respect human rights and humanitarian law. In a statement issued yesterday, Mr. Ayala Lasso reminded the

parties of their solemn obligation to abide by the standards of international humanitarian law.

The international community was alarmed by the actions of Chechen fighters who had taken large numbers of civilians, including women and children as hostages, and reports that some had died or been wounded as a result of the violence. The High Commissioner stressed that nothing could justify hostage-taking and other attacks on innocent non-combatants.

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Social and economic conditions in Haiti were still extremely harsh, unemployment was soaring and there was little investment in the country, according to a United Nations spokesman. Under-Secretary-General Chinmaya Gharekhan told the Security Council yesterday that only one third of the United States $1.7 billion aid package pledged last year had actually materialized. Most of what had come in had gone for balance of payments support and debt cancellation.

Meanwhile, Haiti's provisional electoral council has announced that Rene Preval won 87.9 per cent of the popular vote and his runner-up only 2.5 per cent in the country's recent Presidential elections. The United Nations spokesman said 28 per cent of registered voters went to the polls. President-elect Rene Preval has asked that the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) stay another six months with the same mandate.

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The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has discussed ways to implement the Platform for Action adopted at the Beijing Women's Conference. The Committee, which began a three-week session yesterday, monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Experts said the Platform must become a yardstick as new reporting guidelines for States parties to the Convention were introduced.

The Committee also heard reports from Cyprus. Experts said special measures were required to reduce the concentration of women workers in low paying jobs and increase their numbers in decision making positions. Welcoming recent legislative changes in Cypriot law to promote women's equality, the Committee stressed the importance of gender sensitive training for judges and law enforcement officers. It also asked for more information on health care, grounds for divorce, inheritance rights, abortion, the legal age for marriage, violence against women and trafficking in women.

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